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# The effects of seasonal business diversification of British Columbia ski resorts on forest management

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ABSTRACT

Some ski resorts are shifting their business models from winter-only snow-based activities to year-round tourism. This may be happening as a result of climate change or because of a change in recreationists' behaviour, amongst other causes. Using destination governance as a theoretical framework, this research sought to understand factors that allow such business shifts, as well as the impacts of such shifts on forest management in the areas surrounding the ski resorts. Four case studies in British Columbia were chosen: Whistler, Sun Peaks resort, Hemlock Valley resort and Mount Washington resort. In each case, opinions of stakeholders were collected through semi-structured interviews and the data were analyzed by a method inspired by grounded theory and thematic analysis. The strength of the communities and their incorporation into resort municipalities were identified as critical factors allowing a shift from winter-only to all-season to happen in a ski resort. Forestry practices were affected by the shift because of a change in management values towards more recreation and aesthetic values. An increase in the number of stakeholders with varied vested interests in forest management was believed to have resulted in improved destination management and leadership. The quality of life of shifted communities increased and was linked to a more environmentally friendly approach to land stewardship. This research contributes to overall research on destination governance and leadership.

*Management implications:* The experiences in Canadian resorts show that forest management around mountain resorts require new priorities. Three aspects are crucial:

- A shift in seasonal management considering outdoor recreation all year round.
- A lesser focus on extraction maintaining visual values.
- An inclusion of more stakeholders in the management system supporting self-regulation mechanisms in land stewardship and enhancing the quality of life of the residents.

## 1. Introduction

Some ski resorts, especially in North America, have transformed a snow-based single season (winter-only) business to a year-round business (Needham , Wood, Rollins, 2004). This transformation has occurred because it enables operators to maintain year-round employment, offset infrastructure and operating costs, generate profit, and provide access for people who may not otherwise be able to experience alpine settings (Saremba & Gill, 1991). A change in emphasis from some snow-related activities towards extreme sports has been proposed as a potential paradigm shift within the tourism industry (Burgin & Hardiman, 2012) and this change could have an impact on the expansion of the land base used by visitors and residents alike.

Seasonality in tourism is also very important and is well-documented in the tourism literature, particularly in relation to the peripheral cold winter regions of Europe and North America (Baum & Hagen, 1999; Butler, 2001). Seasonality can be seen either from a natural e.g. weather, animal behaviour, or an institutional point of view e.g. holiday periods. However, Amelung, Nicholls, and Viner (2007) argue that there are three additional causes of seasonality: (1) social pressure or fashion; (2) sporting season; and (3) inertia on the part of travelers, who continue to practice tourism at a particular time of the year even though they are no longer restricted to this period. The shift from a purely snow-based winter business to a year-round business could be seen as a sub-problem of the seasonality issue.

Tourism product diversification can be an effective adaptation strategy for industry in response to climate change, especially for winter resorts that are threatened by warming temperatures and

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unreliable snow conditions (Dubois & Ceron, 2006). However, relatively few recent studies have addressed the diversification of ski resorts. In North America and Europe, significant efforts are being made to diversify ski resorts by operating chairlifts at alpine ski areas in the summer to accommodate activities such as hiking and mountain biking (Needham, Rollins, Wood, 2004). For instance, 12% of the ski areas in British Columbia (BC), Canada, had lifts operating in the summer of 1991; a decade later summer operations occurred in 65% of these areas. This is significant as some ski areas receive over 250,000 visitors each summer (Needham, Wood et al., 2004). Until the mid-1980s, most visits to Australian ski resorts occurred during winter, however, by 1988 approximately 50% of visits occurred outside of the winter season. Although the focus of 70% of these summer visitors was car touring and sightseeing, other activities included bushwalking and camping, abseiling, paragliding and fishing (Buckley, Pickering, & Warnken, 2000; Burgin & Hardiman, 2012).

Some studies have moved beyond a simple explanation of seasonality to explain the observed shift. The most frequent explanation is climate change and the likelihood of less and less snow at some resorts (Amelung et al., 2007; Scott & McBoyle, 2007). The second most frequent reason for the observed shift seems to be a change in the practice of sport/nature tourism due to the advent and increased popularity of extreme sports (Burgin & Hardiman, 2012). Due to the transition towards extreme sports, there is now increased demand for more resort-based built infrastructure that emphasizes social networking and public demonstration of thrill-based 'freestyle' tricks and stunts, rather than an immersion in a nature-based experience (Edensor & Richards, 2007).

The Global Observation Research Initiative in Alpine Environment (2016) suggested that alpine ecosystems remain poorly understood. Ski resorts are often located in high-altitude alpine zones, making them vulnerable to change. For instance, in Chile, species such as *Pinus contorta* are invading the timberline ecotone (Pauchard et al., 2009); in Hawaii non-native species adapted to cold conditions are a problem at higher altitudes (Daehler, 2005); and in Australia gardens in ski resorts have triggered plant invasions of native habitat (Williams, Hahs, & Morgan, 2008). The ski/snow industry directly impacts ecosystems as some techniques to prevent soil erosion on ski slopes also involve the introduction of non-native species, with unknown long-term consequences (Tsuyuzaki, 1995).

In British Columbia, forests have traditionally been managed for timber production. However, the increasing importance of nature-based tourism within the province means that forests also have significant value as a tourism resource (Hilsendager, Harshaw, & Kozak, 2016). Crown forest land in BC is widely accessible for recreational opportunities ranging from snowmobiling and cross-country skiing to hiking, camping, hunting, and fishing. British Columbia has 12 ski resorts spread over its 10 mountain ranges stretched across the province (Skiing & Ski map, 2017). We studied four ski resorts in the province with an aim to provide an enhanced socio-ecological understanding of the management diversity of the forested and non-forested land covering the ski resort areas, and analyzed the shift from winter only to year-round business plans. Specifically, the study investigated the following questions: what factors and mechanisms allow a shift to a year-round business to happen in a ski resort and how does a shift in seasonal management of a mountain resort influence or change the way the surrounding forest is managed?

### 1.1. Destination governance

To contextualize the case studies, a brief review of the pertinent resort governance literature is presented. Beritelli, Bieger, Laesser (2007) define governance as a concept that encompasses the values, rules, institutions and processes through which public and private stakeholders seek to achieve common objectives and make decisions. Within resorts, a community-driven need to control and monitor the action of single companies and entrepreneur exists. These enterprises and related stakeholders pursue their economic interests by sourcing from the natural and cultural resources of the destination, which are perceived as public assets. Previous research has shown that changes in governance strategies provide useful keys to understanding the dynamics and competitiveness of destinations (Svensson, Nordin, & Flagestad, 2006). In the corporate model of governance, there are hierarchical relationships with concentrated power, whereas for community type destinations, the development process involves informal connections, knowledge and trust, making a dynamic (and therefore a historical) perspective crucial to the analysis of the network's formation and influence (Beritelli et al., 2007). In this section, we examine the governance structure of each of the resorts investigated in this study; namely, Whistler, Hemlock Valley, Sun Peaks, and Mount Washington.

Whistler has experienced a shift from an investor-driven pro-growth model, with limited public input into decision-making, to a highly democratic community-driven governance approach that can be characterized as a corporatist model. Whistler Resort was established as a result of a merger between Blackcomb and Whistler mountains in 1996 under the ownership of Intrawest Corporation. In 2016, a Colorado-based company Vail Resorts purchased Whistler Resort and has made significant investment since then into upgrading the skihill. The current model in Whistler is ideologically aligned with the principles of sustainability due to its focus on inclusive participation of citizens in decision-making (Bramwell & Lane 2013). The Cheakamus Community Forest (CCF) in Whistler is one of 50 Community Forests in BC and covers 33,067 ha. CCF was established in April 2009 based on a 25-year tenure with the provincial Ministry of Forests and Range and has four main partners: Resort Municipality of Whistler (RMOW), Lil'wat Nation, Squamish Nation, and Richmond Plywood which is the operations contractor. While many resorts exhibit pro-growth approaches to governance, an examination of the corporatist model in Whistler could offer new insights into how a destination could adopt a more sustainable path.

In Hemlock Valley, the Province of British Columbia is the major landholder and influences the actions of Hemlock Valley Recreations, its tenant. In British Columbia, the Regional District does not legally have jurisdiction over vacant, unencumbered, Crown-owned lands. The Regional District regulates and has jurisdiction over all privately held lands (FVRD, Fraser Valley Regional District, 2017). The Province and the Regional District work together to ensure that development agreements between the Province and the resort company is implemented.

Sun Peaks Resort Corporation and the Province of BC have signed a development agreement to which no one else is a party. Under this agreement, Sun Peaks Resort Corporation and its principal shareholder, Nippon Cable of Japan have invested considerable resources in the Sun Peaks development, demonstrating a long-term commitment to the economy of the region, and a vision of building a vibrant, multifaceted year-round resort community with a growing residential population (Drapeau, 2010). Sun Peaks is located on unceded Secwepemc territory and consultation was held with Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities about its development at the founding of Sun Peaks Resort Corporation (FN, First Nations, 2017).

Mount Washington alpine resort is located entirely on private land, owned by the Mount Washington ownership group since 1989, however, it was sold to a Utah-based company Pacific Group Resorts in 2015. Mount Washington resort caters to the permanent and seasonal population of the Mount Washington alpine resort community. As a privately held resort for more than three decades, Mount Washington is not as developed as most comprehensively planned and managed mountain resorts in BC (CVRD, Comox Valley Regional District, 2013). Investment in resort expansion is at the discretion of the existing ownership group, taking into account favourable market conditions. However, limited commercial development has occurred over the past several years (CVRD, Comox Valley Regional District, 2013).

The approach of destination governance, help answer our research questions. Therefore, we hypothesize that (i) the resort's scale, culture

and economy have an influence over business shift from winter-only to all season, and (ii) the business shift leads to a change of values' weighting

for socio-economic management of the forests surrounding the communities.

## 2. Methods

This research utilized multiple-case study methodology (Yin, 2009). The research was conducted in four resorts in British Columbia, Canada, namely: Whistler, Hemlock Valley, Sun Peaks, and Mount Washington. The selection of these particular resorts was pragmatic: Whistler represents a large and corporate resort with a long and documented history. The studied business shift has been witnessed since 1980s (Gill, 2000). Hemlock represents the counterpart to Whistler in the sense that it is a small, family-oriented resort that is be operating as a winter-only resort. Sun Peaks lies between Whistler and Hemlock in terms of the seasonality of its business which is currently evolving, and also presents a different climate as it is located in the interior of British Columbia. Mount Washington resort is also a small resort that currently has a winter and summer tourism plan but has recently closed its summer operation.

Pre-studies were conducted in each of the areas to start understanding the resorts and the communities and also to help identifying important stakeholder groups. The gathering of this type of information is one of the characteristics of collaborative initiatives used for investigating the planning and development of tourism destinations from a community-involvement perspective (Jamal & Getz, 1995). Following the pre-studies, semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants in each of the four chosen resorts, followed by a mix of qualitative data analysis inspired by the grounded theory method and thematic analysis. Each interview comprised seven questions directed at addressing both factors associated with the shift and participants' perception about the relationships between the shift and forest management, and long-time effects on the welfare of the community. As some of the information sought after was specialized and technical, we utilized the purposive sampling method (Mason, 2002). In addition, a snowballing sampling method (Noy, 2008) was used to reach beyond the core of the community or business leaders to include forestry professionals, small business owners, government officials, and representatives from environmental organizations. We interviewed a total of 40 key informants in the four resorts. Table 1 presents a detailed description of the type of people interviewed in each resort, grouped by interests.

Classifications were made in terms of permanent residents, second-home owners, seasonal workers and tourists in the case of resorts. Permanent residents at the core of the communities were chosen as their voice is important if elusive, as shown in the history of Whistler described by Gill and Williams (1994). The objective of the interviews was to gain a deep and meaningful insight into the participants' perceptions and responses to factors that allow(ed) a shift to happen and the impact of such a shift on forest management. Interviews were conducted to the point of redundancy (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and saturation (Eisenhardt, 1989).

**Table 1**
Interview participants grouped by case studies.

| Groups | Whistler | Hemlock | Sun Peaks | Mt. Wash. |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Forest professionals | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 |
| Small businesses | 4 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| Municipality | 7 | 0 | 2 | 0 |
| Other government | 0 | 0 | 0 | 2 |
| Resort/lift company | 1 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| Real estate | 2 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Interest groups | 4 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

Interview transcripts underwent line-by-line coding, categorization of codes, and theme generation, assisted by the qualitative data analysis computer software NVivo 10. Data analysis was completed using open and axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). First, we conducted line--by-line review using the actual words and phrases of the participants. During open coding, categories of data (or themes) were identified and characterized. Second, we conducted axial coding by reconstructing the data, seeking to understand the relationship of concepts and sub-concepts. During axial coding, the categories were further defined and the relationships between themes were characterized.

Following standard research protocols, all interviews were kept confidential and audio files stored on encrypted and password-protected computer systems. The transcripts were kept anonymous, using numbers instead of participants' names. Each transcript was analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method raised the main themes and issues arising from the participants through the identification and analysis of key patterns. These emergent themes guided the structure and discussion in this paper.

The research was limited to four ski areas in British Columbia. Therefore, the results do not reveal the relative shift and impact on changes in the forest management of all ski areas in Canada. In addition, in this research a small number of participants did now allow us to disaggregate the data to study differences in the opinions among various groups among the case studies. A larger sample of stakeholders would have been desirable, but finding resort experts proved to be problematic, particularly in smaller resorts. Nonetheless, the results do show that the opinions of a relatively small sample of key stakeholders may be useful for indicative purposes.

## 3. Results

### 3.1. Resort characteristics

The four selected case studies present different geographies and different proximities to large urban nodes. Whistler and Hemlock Valley are close to the British Columbia lower mainland, with Whistler being a prime destination for the Vancouver and Seattle, WA, markets and Hemlock Valley targeting Chilliwack, Abbotsford and Mission. Mount Washington is primarily used by Vancouver Island customers due to the necessity to take a ferry to get there from the mainland. Sun Peaks is close to Kamloops, and is too far to attract a large number of people from Vancouver on a regular basis. The majority of interviewees described Whistler and Sun Peaks as year-round resorts compared to Hemlock Valley and Mount Washington, which were described as winter-only resorts in terms of business. Forty percent of the participants described the environmental impacts of the shift as being positive, i.e. no impact in the surrounding areas; 11% described the shift as having negative impacts in the surrounding areas and 34% described the shift as positive but with qualifications, i.e. there are impacts but satisfactory mitigation procedures are in place. Table 2 presents the following dimensions of the resorts (1) resort type (2) governance (3) factors affecting business shift and (4) impact on forest management.

### 3.2. Factors affecting the resort shift

Whistler's shift was described as triggered by a conscious action from a group of very involved and committed individuals. Most interviewees in Whistler pinpointed the shift to the mid- to late 1980s with some of them dating it as precisely as 1986. This particular date corresponds to a request for summer business proposals put out by the municipal council. A public official of Whistler at that time was clear that this particular event triggered the shift:

"Sure I can pinpoint a date: 1986. I was an elected public official of Whistler in 1986 and at that time the municipality didn't have a parks department. They had maybe two little parks and no summer infrastructure. They had the valley trail which is an amazing facility. So I set

**Table 2**
Case studies with description of items.

| Resort | Resort type | Governance | Factors affecting business shift | Impact on forest management |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Whistler | Year-round | Resort Municipality of Whistler, Lil'wat Nation, Squamish Nation, and Richmond Plywood | Committed individuals; municipality status; local government initiatives to attract business; summer events | Development of the demands on the land base and the forest; more emphasis on the recreational and visual values in the forests' use |
| Hemlock | Winter only | Collaborative integrated resource management approach between B.C. government, Langley-based proponent Berezan Group and local Sts'ailes First Nations Band | Absence of local government; lack of summer events | No impact on forest management |
| Sun Peaks | Year-round | Agreement between Sun Peaks Resort Corporation and the Province of BC; Nippon Cable of Japan as a major investor; located on unceded First Nations territory | Established a municipality; resort association; Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) funding; a strong sense of community. | Multiple uses of the forest, shift towards recreation and aesthetics |
| Mount Washington | Winter only | Privately owned by the Mt. Washington ownership group | Population large enough to have a local government; Proximity to bigger cities prevents this community becoming incorporated as a separate municipality. | Shift towards recreation and aesthetics |

out … to build a summer business here. And what we did was offer development rights to people to build facilities, so for instance the Chateau Whistler golf course got built, Nicklaus North golf course got built, there is a tennis facility that never got built but it is still on the table, the developer hasn't built the development but it was one of the proposals: a call for summer amenities." *[Whistler]*.

In Sun Peaks, Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI) funding was awarded to the local government in 2011. The RMI program is intended to assist small, tourism-based municipalities to support and increase visitation. Sun Peaks chose to give all their RMI money to Tourism Sun Peaks on the condition that it would be used exclusively to help increase summer business, mostly through the creation of large events. A participant from the community explained:

"Now, since the municipality was formed, we were able to obtain the RMI funding, which is 3% of the hotel tax, which amounts to approximately C$300,000 per year. And we were able to sit down with Tourism Sun Peaks and say: 'we will provide C$300,000 to you per year, and in exchange we want you to develop a plan for summer season. We think it has to be focused on the biggest potential draw which would be big names concerts.' Something that would put Sun Peaks on the map not only as a mountain resort but also as a summer destination. […] But one thing that the municipal council said was that we did not want any of the C$300,000 going into the winter." *[Sun Peaks]*.

In Whistler, the participants reported that there was an event every weekend throughout the summer and shoulder seasons, sometimes cultural sometimes sporting, and often mixed. A significant proportion of the summer visitors were attracted specifically by these events. This was also recognized as a major draw by participants from other case studies, for instance from Hemlock Valley, describing Mount Washington:

"But they [Mount Washington] have an event every weekend through the summer: beer and wine, bike race, music … which gives a reason for people to go there. That is what Hemlock would have to do as well." *[Hemlock Valley]*.

These statements were confirmed by different respondents in the community "It was direct direction from council and the municipality saying, 'we need to make this year-round' and probably Whistler-Blackcomb and Tourism Whistler were involved. Certainly, it was not organic, it was a conscious decision of our local government to attract business which would make our summers a busy time." *[Whistler]*.

Municipality status was essential for the shift to happen. A municipality requires a governing body of political and economic importance, enabling easier communication and negotiation with the provincial government and other government bodies such as the Ministry of Forests, Lands and Natural Resource Operations, with one participant remarking, "the ski industry in the province has a governance issue. Whistler solved it because they have the municipality, Sun Peaks is in the process, they formed a municipality and they have a resort association. The rest of us, because we do not have a population large enough to have a local government, we got tagged along to the next government, which is the regional district, here it is the Comox Valley." *[Mount Washington]*.

The resort communities are usually quite unique in their needs and functioning; being affiliated to regional districts with radically different geographies, economies and basic needs is very detrimental to the resorts' development. The following quote from a respondent in Hemlock Valley highlighted this issue of communities being different from the people governing them, "our local government here resides in Chilliwack, which is about one foot above sea level. They have no conception whatsoever of what happens when you elevate yourself 3300 feet. We are just down the road from Chilliwack but half a mile up. Our lives are totally different. With respect to environmental concern, access, etc. we are radically different from Chilliwack and our government has no idea. They just think that we are part of the regional district and that we fit like everybody else does." *[Hemlock Valley]*.

There was also acknowledgement that location is fundamental

because although proximity to bigger cities means a large market base to draw upon, too close a proximity prevents a community becoming incorporated as a separate municipality, as can be seen in this quote from a participant in the Mount Washington case study, “in the case of Sun Peaks, the distance and traveling time from Kamloops have been just far enough to really substantiate and support the drive to incorporate as a resort municipality. I think Mount Washington is just a little bit too close to Cumberland and Courtenay and Comox. I can't foresee that happening at least within the next 20 years." *[Mount Washington]*.

Other necessary ingredients to become incorporated as a municipality included a strong sense of community and an appropriate number of permanent residents. The sense of community and the strength it gives were expressed clearly in this quote from a respondent in Sun Peaks, “but then there is a whole transition that has to take place and that is that you have to become a community. That's why I think you do need a local government. Because then things like education are possible, and you can have local schools. I truly believe that to be a great resort you must be a great community." *[Sun Peaks]*.

Another important factor affecting the shift was its adoption by the municipality. In the case of Sun Peaks, its status as a resort municipality, a denomination that has been effectively defined by Whistler, provided it with access to the Resort Municipality Initiative (RMI). Such funding is not restricted to mountain resorts; Tofino and Ucluelet on the west coast of Vancouver Island are good examples of the use of RMI funding for tourism community planning.

Forest management was very different in the four case studies. In Hemlock Valley, it was not significantly affected by the resort whereas at the other locations it varied, with the greatest involvement being at Whistler, which has a community forest. This is due to their intrinsic differences, such as location and size. In all three cases, it was evident that forest management has been affected by the shift from winter only to year-round business. In British Columbia, the Community Forest Agreement is the primary tenure document under which community forests operate. It consists of a different form of tenure on Crown land based not only on timber management, but also allowing members of the community to manage the rest of the biological resources.

The main impact of a successful shift was the change in weighting of recreational and visual values in the forests' use. The increase of these values in management was linked directly to the number of people using the forests surrounding the resorts, especially during the summer months. The following quote is quite representative of the views of respondents who are residents in Whistler:

“Why would we really need to manage the forest if there was no summer tourism? In the winter nobody really cared if there were old-growth [trees] while snowmobiling. […] In the mid-70 s and 80 s there was intensive forestry. The Annual Allowable Cut (AAC) was over a 100.000 $m^3$ a year, it was massive. They were just raping and pillaging the forest, everybody was shocked and offended by it for environmental reasons but from a resort perspective it didn't really have any interplay. So there is no question that the expansion into summer and the year-round conversion had a major impact on the development of the demands on the land base and the forest." *[Whistler]*.

However, as seen in the following two quotes, forest professionals in Whistler and Hemlock Valley had very different perceptions about the extent of change.

“I do not think that the [forest] management has changed dramatically: the magnitude of tourism has increased." *[Whistler]*.

“It is really no different. So for us it will be just another consultation that we deal with." *[Hemlock Valley]*.

For the remaining stakeholders, it was evident that a change in forestry practices is expected when operating within or around a mountain resort: 12 out of 21 interviewees in Whistler, 3 out of 7 in Sun Peaks and 3 out of 6 in Hemlock Valley specifically indicated that the shift had induced or would induce a change in forest management. In Whistler, the vast majority of participants expressed a belief that the shift directly involved a change towards visual and recreational values in forest management even if they did not mention specifically a change in management practices. An interesting distinction in Whistler from other resorts is the presence of a community forest – the first community forest to be awarded to a community not solely for timber extraction. The prominence of visual attributes in the experience sought by users of the forests surrounding the resort was highlighted by respondents in Whistler, “because we moved to the summer operations our emphasis went from the mountain to the whole valley, and to the aesthetics of the whole valley and clearly logging is important." *[Whistler]*.

“Is it a function of us transiting to a summer resort? Absolutely, because the stakes are higher now. If we were just a winter resort it would be less of a concern because the clear cuts don't look so bad when they have snow on them." *[Whistler]*.

Other communities also point to the phenomenon that values of forest management have changed or may change due to the shift towards recreation and aesthetics as the prime, if not sole, value. For instance, a respondent from Mount Washington stated, “one of the interesting effects is that when resorts were not open for the summer they were not interested in what the place looked like, because it was covered in snow. Now that we are open for summer we have to look better: grass seeding, cleaning out. I think it was a real shift when people could see what these places looked like in the summer time." *[Mount Washington]*

In the case of Hemlock Valley, the biggest impact of a shift to year-round recreational use would be an increase of the land base designated for recreation use, following the resort owner's master plan, “[you saw] the new logging on the way up to the resort: they logged all the way to the front door so to speak. I don't think that logging and outdoor recreation go hand in hand that well. They should restrict it at least in the area of the lease and I know he [the resort's owner] has applied for a lot more land with the new lease. It is 442 ha right now and I think the master plan is 4000 ha and restricting logging." *[Hemlock Valley]*

The visual quality and the natural environment were perceived as products sold by the resorts, mainly in the summer, hence a strong incentive for preservation. This does not necessarily imply that it is preserved from an ecological and environmental perspective but that it is preserved to match the expectations and perceptions of the visitors. As a respondent from Sun Peaks observed, “obviously we have to have forest because of the aesthetic and that aesthetic is part of what we sell. So if the whole thing was to burn down or to become terribly diseased and all fell down. So we have to manage for that, so forest health is one.” *[Sun Peaks]*.

Multiple uses of the forest were taken into consideration and the level of stewardship was shown to exceed governmental regulations, at least in the two successful cases studied. The residents' quality of life was higher in Whistler and Sun Peaks than it was in Hemlock Valley. We did not evaluate the quality of life in Mount Washington as it is not really a living community, although it did raise the quality of life of the nearby Comox Valley residents, which is a different phenomenon. Our assessment of residents’ perceptions of their quality of life were based on their responses to questions on family, community, and social life and personal health and wealth. Their opinions on how tourism may or may not affect their quality of life in their community were gathered. The respondents were then randomly presented with 1 of 3 possible tourism resort development scenarios, each with varying degrees of positive and negative impacts. The respondents were then asked to revisit the same set of questions to assess how they expected the resort development, as described in the tourism scenario, would impact their quality of life and life in general.

The results of this study clearly showed that the shift was beneficial. Nearly all (92%) interviewees, who were residents of the neighbouring communities of the resort, stated in one way or another that the shift had been, or would be, tremendously beneficial for the quality of life in the communities. In the case of Hemlock Valley, all participants would

welcome the quality of life that would result from a successful shift. As one respondent from Whistler rather enthusiastically put it:

"Oh, that's a no-brainer! Massive improvement of the quality of life…" *[Whistler]*. These results indicate that residents of the neighbouring communities acknowledge that there would be economic benefits but perceive that the loss from the social and environmental point of view would outbalance the gains.

## 4. Discussion

This study has identified the factors and mechanisms that could allow a business shift to happen in specific British Columbian ski resorts, and the potential implications for forestry practices. We found that for a successful shift to happen, incorporation into a resort municipality is critical. This allows for a different level of negotiation with higher levels of government. In British Columbia, it also gives access to economic benefits such as RMI funding, which is a powerful tool to diversify resorts into year-round businesses. This creates a momentum and the marketing impact necessary to go beyond the tendency for mountain resorts to be still mostly seen as ski resorts, i.e. snow-based. Important links between ski resorts and municipalities were studied by Lasanta, Laguna, & Vicente-Serrano (2007) in Spain and corroborate our findings, namely that positive socio-economic changes occur in ski resorts that are incorporated as municipalities. Recent research surrounding destination governance provides insights into the underlying mechanisms that influence decisions and actions by uncovering the motivational and decisional context of relevant actors (Beritelli & Bieger 2014). Our study corroborates the view that destination management is a multi-faceted, highly dynamic social phenomenon that requires participation of different stakeholders, including the government, local communities and, businesses (Beritelli & Laesser, 2017).

The study found that in order to become a municipality, a strong community with a strong sense of community is necessary. A shift requires conscious actions and destination leadership by the local government and stakeholders and did not happen organically. Research on destination management and governance is now evolving towards destination leadership (Beritelli & Bieger, 2014; Pechlaner, Kozak, & Volgger, 2014). Past research on destination leadership suggests that charismatic entrepreneurs, business managers, municipality and influential politicians could take control of the leadership at the destination (Komppula, 2014). Our research corroborates with the Komppula (2016) that the leadership in destination is attributed to leaders, as a group of very involved and committed individuals were the main force behind a successful shift in our case studies. Saraniemi and Komppula (2017) studied different kinds of factors and internal stakeholders' actions that contribute to destination brand identity in a ski destination and found that a strong informal stakeholder group can take the leadership in brand development.

In this study, we also attempted to relate these shifts to location, as proximity to large urban centres will attract more visitors during the summer season. Konu, Laukkanen, and Komppula (2011) segmented Finnish ski resort visitors according to ski destination choice attributes and found that location is an important factor that skiers use when selecting their destinations from among competing ski resorts. This includes time savings, which derive from a close-to-home location thereby enabling more time for skiing. This can be influenced by the extent of on-site accommodation, and the policy of the resort company (which may discourage day visitors through significant discounts to longer term visitors). Pegg, Patterson, & Gariddo (2012) studied the after-effects of the business shift in an Australian alpine area. The study was conducted with managers of small hospitality businesses. The majority of interviewees acknowledged that there had been an increase in the number of summer visitors each year which had forced them to make changes to their operations. This indicates that from the point of view of a resort, small businesses or ultimately the community, the change in visitor behaviour is a direct causal factor in resorts becoming year-round businesses. In recent years, a number of resorts in North America have begun to aggressively promote their meetings and conference market agendas, with recent figures suggesting that many visitors to ski resorts are there for work-related activities or non-skiers seeking an alternative travel experience and want to participate in a range of summer recreation activities (Hudson, 2000; Scott & McBoyle, 2007). This has resulted in a subtle yet discernable shift to all season operations (Pegg et al., 2012).

We found that a shift in seasonal management of a mountain resort influences the forest management in the surrounding land base, moving it more towards recreation and visual values and with a lesser focus on extraction. The shift promotes the inclusion of more stakeholders in the management system and enhances the quality of life of the residents. This stakeholder engagement may lead to self-regulation mechanisms in land stewardship. From a forest management perspective, we found that participants put a greater weight on visual and aesthetic attributes than other forest management values, such as timber productivity. Within sustainable forest management, policy makers traditionally tend to put more emphasis on environmental and economic values than social values, especially aesthetics. Several authors propose that ecological knowledge and biological diversity of forests and their associated values should play the major role in sustainable forest management and associated decision-making processes because public perception of scenic beauty is the product of a sociocultural construction and varies among individuals (Gobster, 1999; Kimmins, 1999; Lothian, 1999). Yet, when Lim, Innes, and Sheppard (2015) compared awareness of aesthetic values among the general public and forestry experts, they found that aesthetic values were not rated as highly by the general public as ecological and environmental values, whereas forestry experts rated forest aesthetic values as more important than did the general public.

Hudson and Cross (2005) recognized that a related benefit of providing year-round services is year-round employment and in some cases, the chance of career progression for many individuals in the alpine hospitality and tourism industry. Such a shift in operations serves to attract more employees who seek to live in the area. The results of this research indicate that residents of the neighbouring communities acknowledge that there would be economic benefits but perceive that the loss from the social and environmental point of view would outbalance the gains. This was also identified by Lindberg, Andersson, and Dellaert (2001) in a study in Sweden where welfare/gain were compared between residents and tourists for a hypothetical expansion of a ski resort. They found that some residents gain from such an expansion while others lose; the net effect on the community was negative over the range of slopes evaluated. This implies that not all tourism development can be equated with general benefits for communities.

## 5. Conclusion

This paper presents findings from a qualitative study of four ski areas in British Columbia using destination governance as a theoretical framework. It describes general perceptions of factors that allow a shift to occur and the changes in forest management practices that occur as a result of this shift. The factors that allow a shift to occur and the development of a successful business model are numerous and difficult to separate. The geographical assets and the number of residents make a big difference in the ability to make a shift. A combination of market numbers, appropriate location and good timing is necessary, together with the birthing of a community with a strong enough sense of community, which is required to foster destination leadership leading to incorporation into a municipality. Since the inception of Whistler as a year-round resort in the late 1980s, the government created the status of resort municipality, which gave access to RMI funding. The funding has been used to create large events during the summer, an important step in moving towards a year-round business model. However, a shift does not just happen, it is triggered by members of the community. In

the case of small communities lacking the numbers to become municipalities, the willingness of the resort to perform the shift is critical. It is unclear whether there is consensus that forest management practices have changed significantly due to the business shift. Nevertheless, the case studies show a change in forestry practices due to the shift, with a higher propensity for visual quality and recreational use management. Forest management has been evolving in Canada (and BC) because of other factors, and separating these from changes induced by the business shift is difficult. However, it is evident that the business shift has had an impact on resort governance in terms of involvement of community residents and the public in management decision-making.

## Appendix A. - Interview Guide

The following speaking points and questions were used as a preliminary basis for conducting interviews in this study. The interviews were conducted in a semi-structured conversational manner, which resulted in some deviations from this interview script that are not captured here.

*Introductory comments and questions*

Q1. how long have you been living or involved with the community? What is your profession and what is your main recreational activity?

Q2. Could you describe the tourism activities in your town/resort? Follow-up: do you consider the re-sort a year-round resort?

Q3. Did you witness the shift? When did it occur and what was the time frame, was it gradual? What do you thing were the causal factor? Follow-up #1: Do you think that the behaviour patterns of recreationists and tourists have changed and that it impacted the shift?

Q4. What role did the shift play in relation with the institutions, e.g. with Whistler becoming part of the RMI? Did it have implications with governance at a high level, for instance the establishment of a community forest?

Q5. What effect did the shift have on community welfare in terms of employment, quality of life, etc.?

Q6. Do you think that the boundaries of the “system" (i.e. the resort influence zone over the forested area) have expanded following the shift? Can you describe the effect that it on the forest management practices? Do you think it influenced the community engagement in the forest management?

Q7. Do you consider that the shift influenced “in a good way" the socioeconomic equity/balance of the resort? Do you think that more stakeholders have been included in the economy of the resort following the shift?

*Concluding remarks*

Thank you for sharing your knowledge with us today. We will be talking with other people on the resort today and asking them the same questions we talked about today.

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